



Tom Block: "Mystic"

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Mystic

I hang my head in shame. "I'm not a mystic." I raise my head. I look her full in the eyes.

Jazmin lowers her gaze. "I," she begins. "I didn't mean to . . ." She turns away. "Tankeen will be here soon." Then: "He – would you like to meet him?"

Tankeen is Jazmin's Shaykh. I do not want to meet Tankeen.

Sanjay is there. He is a professor of Urdu. He has two children. He says he is spiritually drowning. "I will wait for Tankeen," he says. "When the student is ready, the teacher will appear."

"I had a premonition that I would meet him," Jazmin says. "I was in class. Suddenly, my head was completely enveloped with a purple color. Like a scarf. Or a haze. The next day I met him. Purple is the color of his *tariqah*."

I feel nauseated.

"When Takeen took the *bayah* in Senegal. The Grandshaykh served oatmeal for breakfast. Tankeen did not want to eat it. The Grandshayk's son kept saying: 'you eat it you eat it you eat it' until Tankeen ate it. Tankeen had a bad back. That night, he had a dream that a zipper zipped up his back and made it better. Some people think that the Grandshaykh put something in the oatmeal. But Tankeen —"

Tankeen breezes into the wood-paneled room. It is the lobby of a century-old dormitory hall at Columbia University. He sports a jazz goatee. His dark skin melds with the aged wood all around. A red scarf hangs over his shoulders. His face beams.

"Here he is," says Sanjay. Sanjay steps back and then forward.

"Is this —" begins Tankeen.

"This is Sanjay," Jazmin flutters. Tankeen thrusts out his hand, grabs Sanjay's hand and pulls Sanjay to him. Sanjay sighs. "And this is Tom." Tankeen takes my hand, lets it go and then places his hand against his heart.

"It is nice to meet you," I say.

Tankeen and Sanjay sit down on the hard bench, face to face. Sanjay hopes that Tankeen might be able to save him.

I move with Jazmin to the side. "I want to go," I say.

"I'll escort you home," she says, her voice a scattering of butterflies.

"I don't want to go home."

"I'll take you where you want to go and then come back."

"I want to go to a bar. To sketch. But I need a sketchbook." Am I spiritually drowning, as well? I frown. "Take me to a drugstore." A drugstore might have a sketchbook and a pen. "I didn't bring my sketchbook," I apologize.

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Tom Block is the author of five books, a playwright, 25+ year exhibiting visual artist and Founding Producer of New York City's International Human Rights Art Festival ([ihraf.org](#)). He was a Research Fellow at DePaul University (2010), LABA Fellow (NY, 2013-14), Hamiltonian Fellow (2008-09) and recipient of funding/support from more than a dozen foundations and organizations. [tomblock.com](#)